



gail
rosenblum

So much fun, so much food, so little trash after big event

Doug Mensing was unprepared for what happened to him at a popular festival Sunday in Minneapolis. He got busted. For plastic foam cups.

Mensing, a restoration ecologist, knows green. But when another volunteer parent representing Minneapolis' Boy Scout Troop 6 ran out of recyclable bowls for popcorn and grabbed plastic foam cups, the trash police were on them like bees to honey.

"Oh, gosh, we apologize," he said, as the troop quickly switched to compostable paper. "I'm a real environmentalist," said Mensing, of Minneapolis. "I think it's great."

I empathize. I've been attending the Linden Hills Festival for years, but only recently started looking nervously over my shoulder, clutching my corn husks. Um, recyclable?

Oh, yeah. In fact, for anybody out there planning a community event this summer, here's a tally to top:

Four thousand festival attendees (up from 2,500 last year), plus 1,260 hot dogs, 616 ears of corn, 456 brats, 105 pizzas, ice cream, cotton candy, popcorn, canned soda and bottled water equal 39 pounds of trash, or *less than one* trash can full at the end of that spectacularly sunny day. Less than one.

The "Zero-Waste" effort, in its third year, is run by volunteers from the Linden Hills Neighborhood Council (www.linden hills.org) to promote, in part, its curbside organics collection pilot program. It's led by Keiko Veasey, a Linden Hills resident affectionately known as the Garbage Guru, Waste



**Keiko
Veasey**

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Lots of food and fun, but where's all the trash?

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Wizard, Trash Tamer and, only sometimes, Trash Nazi, she said with a laugh.

Minneapolis provided compost bins for \$20 each, Veasey

said. Hennepin County provided portable recycling units free of charge through a loan program.

Vendors were instructed about no-nos, including foil, straws and balloons.

Many volunteers directed people to the appropriate trash containers, but Veasey, a mother of two and founder of Linden Hills EcoParents, did the dirty work, digging through trash to pull out recyclables and compostables. She also powered through two "Code Red" incidents, one in which festival-goers mistook a bin of electrical cords for a catch-all trash can. The other was an unplanned bin on the nearby playground "full of mixed stuff." Veasey sorted through it, then closed it.

Kris Broberg, a former Minneapolis City Council candidate stumping at the festival for gubernatorial candidate

Tom Emmer, was grateful not to be labeled a troublemaker, although he, too, fessed up to being busted for potato chip bags in non-recyclable packaging.

"How can you say 'no' to Keiko?" he said, as he tucked the chips, meant for passers-by, under his table.

Veasey's tough-love reward came during the final weigh-in (for trash, not visitors, fortunately):

- 448.86 pounds of organic material collected for composting.
- 13.16 pounds of plastic bottles for recycling.
- 20.78 pounds of recyclable cardboard.

- 31.38 pounds of aluminum cans.

- 13.12 pounds of glass recycling.

Another 12 pounds of plastic bags and plastic wrap, not recycled through the city of Minneapolis, was delivered to the city's "It's in the Bag" program (www.mnwastewise.org/recycling-programs/its-in-the-bag.cfm). Seven pounds of recyclable plastic caps and coffee lids went to programs including one at Aveda Institute, which recycles plastic lids.

So, what was left to earn the proud title of dirty, stinky trash? Mostly diapers, dog poop, foam cups brought in from outside the park and gloves worn by those preparing and selling food, Veasey said.

While the Minnesota Green Expo and Eureka Recycling in

St. Paul are working to support or organize zero-waste events, Veasey encourages everybody to try it on a smaller scale. Contact your municipal solid waste department and county environmental services department to learn about options.

"If they are renting a facility," Veasey said, "they would probably start with the facility manager or event planner. I would hope that those folks would be increasingly aware of the possibilities."

On Sunday, volunteers diverted nearly 550 pounds from landfills and incinerators. Three-fourths of one bag of trash, Veasey said, "is not quite 'zero waste,' but it's pretty darn impressive."

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